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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Charitable Institute for Protecting Social Victims, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 January 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Interactive Dialogue with Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief*

Human rights are universal rights in the sense of being intimately linked to the humanness of the human being and hence of all human beings equally. In the first sentence of article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is stated that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". Because of its nature as a universal human right, to which all human beings are entitled, freedom of religion or belief must be interpreted broadly. It cannot be confined to particular lists of religious or belief-related "options" predefined by States, within which people are supposed to remain. Instead, the starting point must be the self-definition of all human beings in the vast area of religions and beliefs, which includes identity-shaping existential convictions as well as various practices connected to such convictions. In paragraph 2 of its general comment No. 22 (1993) on the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the Human Rights Committee corroborated such an open, inclusive understanding by clarifying that article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief, and that the terms "belief" and "religion" are to be broadly construed. The Human Rights Committee also stressed that article 18 is not limited in its application to traditional religions or to religions and beliefs with institutional characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions. One should add that freedom of religion or belief also covers the rights of members of large and small communities, minorities and minorities within minorities, traditionalists and liberals, converts and reconverts, dissenters and other critical voices and, last but not least, women, who sadly still occupy marginalized positions within many religious traditions.

Freedom of religion or belief does not only prohibit undue encroachments on the freedom of a person or a group of persons; it also prohibits discrimination —that is, the denial of equality — on the basis of religion or belief. For example, in article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights it is asserted that: "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status". Article 2 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights extends the same guarantee of non-discrimination to all individuals within the territory of a State party and to those subject to its jurisdiction. 1 Furthermore, it is confirmed in article 2 (1) of the 1981 Declaration that "no one shall be subject to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons or person on the grounds of religion or belief", thus the component of "belief" is also included. A strong message is sent in article 3 of the 1981 Declaration, in which it is stated that: "Discrimination between human beings on the grounds of religion or belief constitutes an affront to human dignity and a disavowal of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations".

There was an increasing level of Islamophobia under tne covered period, indicated by the growing fear against Islam and Muslims in certain parts of the world which led to negative perceptions among non-Muslims. Within such circumstances, Islam was seen as a serious threat; a religion of intrinsic violence whose disciples had a tendency to spread harm to the followers of other religions. Islam has been portrayed as an 'alien' religion prone to bloodshed, a stigma that trigger intolerant attitudes amongst non-Muslims *vis-à-vis* their otherwise. These negative stereotyping eventually ended up into negative sentiments, dread or hatred of Islam that includes multi-level discrimination against Muslims, manifested into exclusion of Muslims around the world from the economic, social, and public life.

On the other hand such a new wave of terrorism has brought about a huge impact on Islamophobia, for the number of incident have multiplied almost everywhere across the globe. Particularly in Europe, innocent Muslims have been victimized, facing immediate backlash while the sentiment soon transformed into a bold stigma: that Islam encourages violence; that the religion is not really compatible with liberal values; that Muslims prone to be extremists and terrorists; that Islam is an out-of-date religion which need a Reformation to adapt modernity; and so on.

Charitable institute for protecting social victims and International Society for Supporting Victims of Terrorism urge the human rights council to once again recall the member states their responsibility regarding promotion and protection of rights to freedom of religion and belief.

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*International Society for Supporting Victims of Terrorism, an NGO without consultative status, also shares the views expressed in this statement.